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Conference Abstract

Panel Discussion: Institutional Earthquakes and Recovery Experiences: Continuing to be Collections Stewards in an Uncertain World

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Abstract

Animals, plants, minerals, fossils etc. in our collections are part of our cultural and natural heritage. Their sustainable preservation and care is part of our mission as natural history collections and our main task. This demand for long-term stability is in contrast to an increasingly dynamic environment.

New technologies and methods enable different management and use of the collections. Research is moving from areas such as evolution and biodiversity discovery to applied sciences and public engagement with science. Institutional visions are changing over time with new leadership. Institutions are separating from or merging with other organizations. New laws and regulations are determining the way we collect and collaborate. Last but not least, we are facing a world of quickly changing financial resources, political and societal priorities, and values.

All these aspects have an impact on the way we manage and maintain our collections. Like earthquakes with possible impact in both directions, in positive, catalysing as well as negative, disruptive ways. Museum professionals have to deal with these challenges, react

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to them, anticipate them, and sometimes proactively integrate them into their plans and work.

What kind of questions are we facing as museum professionals? Is there always a correct decision? What is worth fighting for and what do we have to accept? How can museum professionals balance contradicting positions? How can we find alternatives?

Butler and Quaisser will draw upon their experiences in dealing with institutional earthquakes to lead a panel discussion with representatives from different management levels and institutional environments. We will focus on recovery experiences and strategies. We encourage the audience to bring their examples and experiences to the discussion engagement and hope for a lively and fruitful discussion that leads to greater capacity to recover quickly from these challenges.

Keywords

Collections stewardship, natural history collections, challenges, strategies, recovery experiences

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